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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SISTANI URGES SCIRI HEAD AL-HAKIM TO CALM SHI'A, PROTECT
SUNNIS; CRITICIZES PERFORMANCE OF SECURITY FORCES

CLASSIFIED BY: AFRED FONTENEAU, REGIONAL COORDINATOR, REO,
AL-HILLAH, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (U) This is a SET Najaf cable.

12. (C) Summary: Grand Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani urged Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, head of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), to calm the Shi'a, protect Sunni shrines and prevent further violence. The February 24 meeting took place at Sistani's Old City, Najaf, home. A second senior Najaf ayatollah, Mohammed Saeed Al-Hakim, criticized the role of the militias. Sistani criticized the performance of the security forces for their inability to prevent widespread retaliatory attacks against Sunnis in the wake of the February 22 bombing of the Al-Askariyah shrine in Samarra. End summary.

13. (C) Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim traveled to Najaf February 24 to meet with senior Shi'a clerics Sistani and Mohammed Saeed Al-Hakim in the wake of the bombing of the Al-Askariyah shrine in Samarra, according to a Najaf SCIRI official and the office manager of a third senior cleric, who spoke to SET Najaf local staff. Al-Hakim visited the Imam Ali shrine, the shrine of his deceased brother, Mohammed Baqr Al-Hakim, who was killed in a Najaf car bomb attack in August, 2003, and met with Sistani and Mohammed Saeed Al-Hakim separately in their homes. Local staff reported extremely tight security and numerous armored cars in the area of the shrines and the ayatollahs' homes.

14. (C) Sistani told Al-Hakim that the national government, acting with the guidance of the ayatollahs, must calm the Shi'a and stop sectarian violence. He said that the security forces and the people must protect Sunni mosques and lives. He urged the Shi'a to withdraw from any Sunni mosques that they had occupied in the days since the bombing. Sistani called upon the politicians to unite the country and form a national unity government, which the cleric said was their duty. The people had already performed their duty by voting in the national election, Sistani admonished.

15. (C) Mohammed Saeed Al-Hakim called for the militias to be a force for unity in the country, rather than one of disorder. Sistani criticized the performance of the security forces for failing to maintain order and prevent sectarian fighting after the bombing, and praised the role of Moqtada Al-Sadr in calming the situation.

FONTENEAU